

This issue of *What's Trending* is full of important updates for Montana communities. Get **FREE signage** for the **updated Montana Clean Indoor Air Act**, which now includes vaping. The **Blackfeet Tribal Council** has **banned Kratom** and new research reveals **serious risks of marijuana use during pregnancy**. Think **supervised drinking keeps teens safe**? Science says **nope**—and with **Montana leading the nation in excessive drinking**, that's worth noting. Even without nicotine, **vaping harms the lungs immediately**. Plus, scientists have **found the brain region driving compulsive drinking**, and Officer Gomez answers: **"Is my kid smoking marijuana?"**

what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

November 2025, Issue 11

Montana Goes Vape-Free Indoors: Cascade County City County Health Department Leads Awareness Efforts



The Cascade County Tobacco Education Specialist has been busy spreading the word about Montana's updated Clean Indoor Air Act, which now includes vapes. Penny Paul has been giving interviews, recording radio ads, sharing press releases, presenting to schools and community groups and connecting with other Tobacco Education Specialists across Montana.

Recently, she did an interview with KRTV and gave a presentation to the Cascade County Board of Health on October 1 (starts at 48:55), highlighting the inclusion of e-cigarettes in the law. With SB 390 now signed by Governor Gianforte, Montanans are protected from e-cigarette aerosols in workplaces and indoor public spaces. Businesses will post signs, the public can report violations and experts like Penny point out that this law helps keep the air cleaner and reinforces healthier norms for youth.

Businesses can pick up free signs at the City-County Health Department, the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Great Falls Association and Alliance for Youth. Signs are also available online through Montana's tobacco prevention website. Residents can report violations of the Clean Indoor Air Act at tobaccofree.mt.gov or by calling 406-454-5071.

Kratom Prohibited: Blackfeet Tribal Council Imposes Ban



The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council has taken a proactive step to protect community health by banning the sale, use and possession of Kratom on its reservation...an apparent **first among tribal governments in Montana**. Officials cited concerns over the plant's addictive, opioid-like effects and will enforce criminal penalties on retailers to prevent its spread. [READ MORE](#).

Kratom Locked Up, Cigars Left Out: October Scans Reveal Gaps in Product Controls

Three members of the **Cascade County Substance Abuse Prevention Alliance (SAPA)** participated in **quarterly environmental scans** on October 21, 2025.

Locations Observed:

- **Noons** (1300 12th Ave S. & 3200 10th Ave S.)- Both locations sell Kratom. Products are locked up and sales are restricted to individuals 21 and older, though such restrictions are not required by Montana or federal law.
- **Town Pump** (1400 10th Ave S., 1411 10th Ave S., 401 10th Ave S., 700 10th Ave S.)-Issues were observed at two locations. At the 401 10th Ave. S. location, they have an entire shelving unit of cigars that is not behind the counter. While the unit is adjacent to the checkout area, clerks primarily work at the opposite end, making the products easy to grab and go. At the 700 10th Ave S. location, discounted cans of wine and bottles of margaritas were placed right by the entrance.
- **Keith's Country Store (1621 10th Ave S.)**-This store has expanded its Kratom products to include drinks. It also features a large display of Kava-based drink marketed as a plant-powered, non-alcoholic, "social tonic" for relaxation.
- **On Your Way Conoco (3601 10th Ave S.)**- Sells Kratom but keeps it locked up and restricts sales to individuals 21 and older.
- **Walmart Gas Station/Convenience Store (5320 10th Ave S.)**- No issues were observed at this location.

New Research Flags Big Risks With Cannabis Use In Pregnancy



A new study suggests marijuana may harm human eggs, raising the risk of **infertility, miscarriage and birth defects**. Researchers linked higher THC levels to **chromosome problems** in eggs — adding to growing evidence that **cannabis can affect reproductive health**.

This is especially worrying because **cannabis use during pregnancy in the U.S. has more than tripled since 2002**, despite studies already connecting it to autism, poor fetal

growth, low birth weight and preterm delivery.

Why it's so concerning?

- **Stronger weed:** THC levels are **4x higher** than in the 1990s and concentrates often top 40%.
- **Wellness marketing:** Cannabis is often pitched to pregnant women as a safe fix for nausea or stress, **without clear warnings**.
- **Unknowns remain:** We still don't fully know the long-term harm, but the evidence keeps piling up — especially with today's stronger products.

The takeaway: We need better warning labels, stricter marketing rules, more education and

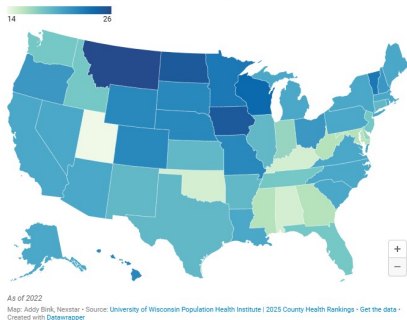
Think Supervised Drinking Protects Teens? Science Says Nope



Think letting your teen sip alcohol under your watch keeps them safe? Think again. While many parents believe supervised drinking is a smart harm reduction strategy, research tells a different story. Studies consistently show that giving teens alcohol—or even just permission to drink—actually **increases their risk of future alcohol-related harms**. Supervised drinking doesn't protect them. It puts them at greater risk, no matter their age. [READ MORE.](#)

Excessive Drinking: Montana Leads the Nation

Excessive Drinking by State
The % of respondents who self-reported excessive drinking



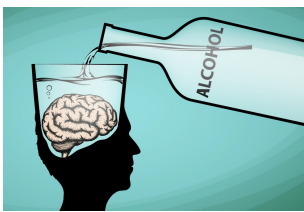
Although some Americans are drinking less than previous generations, **one in six adults still report binge drinking**. The CDC defines binge drinking as five or more drinks on one occasion for men, or four or more for women. **Montana had the highest rate, with 26%** of adults reporting excessive alcohol use. County-level data is also available on the CDC's interactive map [\[here\]](#). **Excessive alcohol use** causes about 20 deaths per hour or roughly 178,000 per year. It includes **binge drinking, heavy drinking** (eight or more drinks per week for women, 15 for men), **any drinking during pregnancy and underage drinking**.

Vaping — Even Without Nicotine — Has an Immediate Negative Effect on Lungs



Vaping, like smoking, immediately reduces blood flow — even when the vape doesn't contain nicotine. This means the user's lungs may be taking in less oxygen. Even products labeled "nicotine-free" often contain other harmful components that can irritate the airways and cause inflammation, which can then spread throughout the body much like particle pollution does. Research has shown that about **99% of vapes labeled as "nicotine-free" actually contain nicotine**, raising further concern about their safety and transparency. [READ MORE.](#)

Scientists Identify Brain Region Driving Compulsive Drinking



A new study has zeroed in on a specific part of the brain linked to compulsive drinking. Researchers found that **the brain physically adapts to rely on alcohol to relieve stress and anxiety, creating a powerful feedback loop that makes quitting extremely difficult**. Using advanced brain imaging, they observed changes in how this region works and connects with other areas in people with alcohol use

disorder. The hope is that by targeting this brain region, future treatments could better reduce cravings and help people struggling with alcohol dependence. It's a big step toward understanding how the brain drives addiction and finding more effective ways to treat it. [READ MORE.](#)



Montana Substance Violation Reporting: What to Know & Where to Go

- **Unlawful or Suspicious Alcohol-Related Activities** - Report violations such as underage drinking or serving/selling to someone who is actually, apparently or obviously intoxicated. [CLICK HERE.](#)
- **Cannabis-Related Issues**
 - For concerns regarding **medical or adult-use cannabis dispensaries**, [CLICK HERE.](#)
 - Report illegal sale or use of **synthetic cannabis** by [CLICKING HERE.](#)
 - If you suspect **illegal sale of consumable hemp products** (not authorized as a food or drug by the FDA), report it by [CLICKING HERE.](#)
- **Tobacco/Nicotine Product Violation** - Report sales to under the age of 21 to keep nicotine and tobacco out of the hands of youth. [CLICK HERE.](#)
- **Montana Clean Indoor Air Act Violations** - Submit violations including vaping, which is now included under the Act. [CLICK HERE.](#)



Reminder: Vaping is now included in Montana's Clean Indoor Air Act. To help your business or organization comply and reduce enforcement issues, free "No Smoking, Vaping or Marijuana" signs are available for entrances.

Order your free signs here:

<https://mthhs promotions.rocsoft.com/public/login>
(Quick account setup required)

Missed the October edition of What's Trending?

[Click here](#) to listen to a short podcast with all the highlights on KGPR, sponsored by Great Falls–Cascade County Crimestoppers.

What's Trending?

A look at drug and alcohol trends happening
in Great Falls and Cascade County



*Cascade County Substance Abuse Prevention Alliance
Alliance for Youth
Great Falls/Cascade County Crimestoppers*

CASCADE COUNTY



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